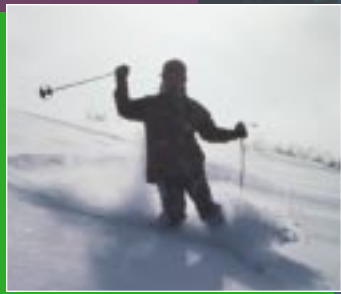


The Recreation Agenda



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE



FOREST SERVICE





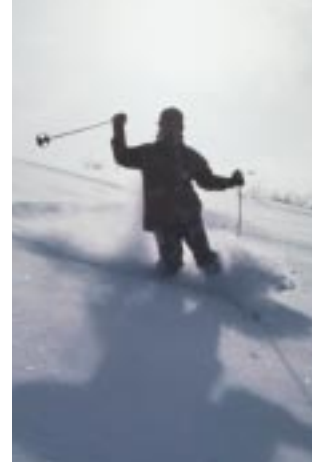
The importance of recreational use as a social force and influence must be recognized and its requirements met. Its potentialities as a service to the American people, as the basis for industry and commerce, as the foundation of the future economic life of many communities, are definite and beyond question.

— ROBERT Y. STUART
Forest Service Chief, 1928-33



VISION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service will meet the Nation's present and future needs for outdoor recreation in a manner that protects the health, diversity, and productivity of the land.



INTRODUCTION

The USDA Forest Service has significant responsibilities for stewardship of the Nation's forest and grassland resources. The goals and objectives of the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan will guide future agency actions. The four goals of the Strategic Plan address ecosystem health, multiple benefits to people, scientific and technical assistance, and effective public service.

The purpose of the Recreation Agenda is to provide focus for programs and activities we will undertake to meet the recreation-, heritage-, and wilderness-related goals and objectives in our Strategic Plan.

The development of the Recreation Agenda includes ideas, suggestions, and concerns from local and national organizations and individual stakeholders. People are asking for an ever broader spectrum of benefits and services to

enrich their outdoor experiences. The Recreation Agenda is an outline for how we will address the needs and expectations of millions of people who use national forests while protecting the health and integrity of the land.

As we head into the new millennium, our challenge is to concentrate on five key areas:

- ❶ Improve the settings for outdoor recreation.
- ❷ Improve visitor satisfaction with our facilities and services.
- ❸ Improve educational opportunities for the public about the values of conservation, land stewardship, and responsible recreation.
- ❹ Strengthen our relationships with private entities and volunteer-based and nonprofit organizations.
- ❺ Establish professionally managed partnerships and intergovernmental cooperative efforts. ❖

BACKGROUND

Americans cherish the national forests and grasslands for the values they provide—clean water, clean air, natural scenic beauty, spiritual renewal, important natural resources, protection of rare species, majestic forests, wilderness, a connection with their history, and opportunities for unparalleled outdoor adventure. Recreation visitors want a great deal from their national forests in terms of settings, experiences, facilities, and services; and they will expect even more in the future. Recreation is the fastest growing use on the national forests and grasslands.

The national forests and grasslands offer a diversity of opportunities. We manage 63 percent of the wilderness system in the lower 48 States, and a much larger percentage of backcountry experiences.

The American people have 4,268 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers; 399 wilderness areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System; 133,087 miles of hiking, horse, and off-highway-vehicle (OHV) trails, including portions of 6 national scenic trails and 11 national historic trails; extensive hunting and fishing opportunities; 383,000 miles of authorized roads; more than 277,000 heritage sites; over 4,300 campgrounds; and 31 national recreation areas, scenic areas, and monuments. Their active enjoyment of these lands contributes a significant amount to the gross domestic prod-

uct, with the largest share associated with outdoor recreation. National forests have a unique "niche" of nature-based, dispersed recreation to offer, including undeveloped settings, built environments reinforcing the natural character, and wildland settings that complement enjoyment of these special places. Resource-based travel and tourism provide a window through which an increasingly urban society can enjoy and appreciate the natural world.

The Forest Service has the opportunity to open that window even wider to special places and experiences to reflect changes in demographic trends and recreation visitor preferences. We will encourage travel and tourism opportunities in collaboration with tourism professionals and State Tourism Offices that represent the diversity of existing and potential visitors.



Both our deteriorating infrastructure and our recreation visitors are demanding more attention. This agenda focuses on meeting as much of that demand as possible within ecological and social limits. These limits include impacts on the resource, impacts on experiences of other visitors, and limits of the recreation infrastructure.

Management of these cherished resources requires a long-term viewpoint and investment strategies. Years of declining budgets and a dwindling recreation workforce have made the challenges even more formidable. The agency has responded with innovative efforts such as the fee demonstration program, permit streamlining, nongovernmental partnerships, and help from volunteers. We will find even more innovative ways to accomplish the work to be done.

"The USDA Forest Service is committed to provide the best possible stewardship, benefiting current and future generations of American people. The realities of diverse interests, finite budgets, and environmental considerations will each influence the choices to be made in the management of forest and grassland resources. Delivering on this commitment requires understanding of the public's interests through direct discussions and collaboration; financial support through Congressional appropriations, volunteers, partners, and user fees; development and use of scientific information; and broad support for the agency's long-term goals and objectives." —from the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan. ❖

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Settings

Maintaining the integrity of the landscape setting is essential to ecosystem viability and the recreation experience. Enjoyment of scenery is central to quality recreation experiences and travel/tourism opportunities. Quality habitat is necessary for wildlife observation and hunting, while productive fisheries depend on clean water. Quality natural settings and well designed and maintained structures and signing must work in harmony to enhance and protect those settings.

Protect and Restore Natural Character

Through skillful application of recreation and ecological planning, cultural resource protection, scenery management, and social research, we will identify attributes of the natural, social, and built environments essential for ecological sustainability and recreation opportunity. As we strive for correct limits of use and balance, we will manage recreation activities within the range of natural variability in ecosystem composition, structure, and function—understanding that the levels of diversity and complexity and natural rates of change are vital to sustaining the amenities and experiences that society desires. Maintaining this natural character will include management of noxious and exotic species and other elements that affect the

natural and scenic quality of the landscape and waters. Attention to the full spectrum of recreational opportunities and constructed features will reinforce natural character and image.

Invest in Some Facilities and Remove Others

We estimate there is an \$812 million backlog in repair and maintenance of existing facilities. We must prioritize facilities to be upgraded to meet health, sanitation, and accessibility standards. At the same time we must be prepared to remove buildings and infrastructure that no longer meet our needs, are not in tune with the natural setting, present significant health and safety problems, or are too expensive to maintain. To protect and assure the proper care of natural settings, we will need to strengthen some heavily used and fragile sites. New construction should be limited and will need to focus only on resolving resource impacts, meeting identified demand, and helping to diversify local economies. Appropriations are not sufficient to bring all existing facilities to an acceptable standard, or to construct new facilities that meet changing visitor demands or reduce environmental impacts. We will partner with volunteers, nongovernmental organizations, other agencies, and private sector business partners to get the job done.

Manage OHV Use

Off-highway-vehicle use is a legitimate use of national forest lands, and we are working with the OHV community to assure high-quality motorized opportunities and quality experiences while maintaining acceptable and balanced environmental impacts on trails. We also recognize that certain settings are inappropriate for OHV use due to administrative or congressional designation, impacts on ecological resources, or effects on other recreationists. We will move toward designated use areas and travelways on a site-by-site basis through the forest planning system, establishing a monitoring process that will closely track use over time.

We will work closely with the OHV community, including Tread Lightly! and Leave No Trace, to develop educational materials and good-user ethic guides that will assure acceptable levels of impact in natural settings. We will engage these users to assist with the management of trails and use areas, and in the monitoring of use on environmental quality.

Showcase Nationally Designated Areas

We have the stewardship responsibility for outstanding nationally designated areas whose facilities and services are languishing. We will emphasize national recreation and scenic areas

and national monuments, national scenic byways, national trails, and historic sites as showcases for quality recreation and as laboratories for new initiatives. We will capitalize on unique offerings of each special designation. We will examine innovative funding criteria for these areas.

Improve Safety and Security

An experience in the outdoors involves some risk, but we must take preventive measures to reduce criminal activity and have people comply with laws and regulations to protect the setting. We need to use materials focused on preventing problems from natural hazards—wildfire, avalanche, road conditions, weather. Facilities will be built to withstand vandalism and long-term use.

Provide Access to Recreation Opportunities

With the rapid development of areas that surround national forests, many critical public access points are in jeopardy. It is important to work with local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners to plan together for the future of public rights-of-way. With changes in use patterns on the forest transportation system, it is important that we work together to plan for future uses. Equal opportu-

nity and universal design for all people, including people with disabilities, continue to be priorities and will become increasingly important as the baby boomer population ages.

Services

Social science and marketing research will be used to manage and protect resources and shape the services we provide for people. We need better information on when, where, how, and what services should be delivered. We need to make use of a variety of data and delivery sources. These sources include Forest Service employees, national forest permit holders, contractors, private sector partners, and the agency's research and technology arms.

Use Social Science and Market-Based Research

We need to utilize social science and marketing research in determining types and delivery of services. We must use the resources of Research and Development and of the Technology and Development Centers within the Forest Service to address improved visitor services and technology developments to reduce operations costs.

Ensure Services for All People

Ethnically diverse and urban segments of our society are growing rapidly, but their use of the

national forests and grasslands is not increasing proportionately. We will use demographic data and research findings to better determine needs, allocate resources, and align our settings, services, and facilities to these populations.

Recreation planning and implementation will incorporate the needs of all people, including people with disabilities and other underserved groups. We will recruit minority employees and employees with disabilities to better serve all people. We will ensure that law enforcement and other service providers are responsive to the issues of our diverse visitors. We will evaluate access and fairness in program delivery as we formulate services.



Create Partnerships To Enhance and Improve Visitor Services

We will work more closely with other agencies, the private sector, and nonprofit partners to improve visitor information and services, both inside and outside forest boundaries. We will conduct market research cooperatively with local, State, and regional tourism providers. We will work jointly to monitor visitor satisfaction during the entire recreation experience, not just the segments provided by one agency or entity.

At the same time, we must move quickly to enact internal policies and authorities that will allow us to more effectively work with partners.

We need to improve the availability of information so visitors can select settings to match the experiences they desire and know what to expect before they arrive. Through natural resource interpretation and conservation education, visitors may learn how to enhance their own experiences and participate with minimum impact on the land.

Conservation Education and Interpretation

Learning-based recreation is a significant opportunity for both visitors and local communities. Through natural resource conservation messages and interpretive programs, we have the ability to foster a land stewardship ethic in millions of national forest visitors. We manage

delivery systems at our 56 visitor centers and in natural settings where programs are delivered beyond these facilities. Significant resources are required to maintain facilities, staffing, and quality programming. It will take innovative partnerships by Forest Service employees, community educational institutions, volunteers, nongovernmental organizations, contractors, and permit holders to sustain the potential of natural resource conservation education and interpretive programs long term. We will actively promote the Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly! philosophies.

Using the strategy outlined in The Conservation Education Task Force Report: Vision-to-Action Strategy, we will focus on communicating the sustainability of natural and cultural resources in forests, grasslands, and aquatic ecosystems and the interconnectedness of land and people. We will support the teaching of techniques and skills for citizen participation in all aspects of natural and cultural resource stewardship.

Following the lead in that strategy, we will focus on the following target groups:

- **Youth:** providing educational and interpretive experiences in a variety of environments.
- **Urban Communities:** providing a connection to the land to those who are becoming increasingly disconnected from it.

- **Visitors:** enhancing the recreational experience of forest visitors, influencing visitor behavior, and providing information to protect the resource.

Community Connections and Relationships

Strengthening community connections is vital for ecosystem planning, for economic development, and for tapping into existing community networks and resources. Making connections with new constituencies, including urban populations, as well as minorities, persons with disabilities, and other underserved people, is critical in order to respond with future relevant services. The Forest Service needs to institutionalize community collaboration through policy, processes, incentives, and accountability.

Promote Connections for Community Sustainability

We need to plan together to support community objectives for building recreational programs, facilities, and services that contribute to local and regional economies and quality of life. The economic health of communities relies increasingly on the tourism industry, especially in gateway communities. The Forest Service will join commercial ventures, nongovernmental organizations, trade associations, State organizations, and educational institutions in forming

viable and sustainable nature-based tourism industries. When connected to a national forest setting, the Forest Service has a stewardship role in evaluating tourism offerings to ensure they are in the public's best interest and meet ecological constraints and high environmental standards. The agency will provide programs like Passport In Time and Heritage Expeditions.

Conduct Planning Across Boundaries

Because fires, diseases, insects, and even recreationists know no boundaries, State and Private Forestry, National Forest System, and Research and Development will collectively employ a large network of local, regional, State, and multi-State partners. Together these groups can address education, communications, tourism, and stewardship issues that impact or are impacted by recreation.



Promote Stakeholder Collaboration

The most fundamental Forest Service role is management of the forests and grasslands. We will expand opportunities for community input into forest planning. We will welcome environmental interests; user groups; recreation and tourism industries; and State, tribal, and local governments to join us in discussions for planning the future uses of the national forests and grasslands. The close community connection is important to both rural and urban communities.

Address Issues in Urban National Forests

National forests located 1 hour or less from metropolitan areas with populations of 1 million or more are growing in number. These forests are increasingly important because they contribute to the quality of life of millions of people. The agency has the opportunity to become a leader in promoting good land stewardship in communities through the Urban and Community Forestry program. Urban people are placing greater demands on the Forest Service for a wide range of travel and tourism services, educational opportunities, and experiences. Emerging issues such as limits to growth, carrying capacity, competing uses, and multicultural

diversity have occurred on these forests first. They can serve as learning centers or "Windows to the Future" for other forests facing urbanization issues.

Partnerships

Continuing to support existing and establishing new professionally managed partnerships and intergovernmental cooperative efforts are a significant means to accomplish the recreation job. Tribal relationships need to be strong on a government-to-government basis to achieve mutual goals. New skills, a spirit of cooperation, shared expectations, accountability, and new legal authorities may be needed to reach long-term resource management and financially sustaining programs.

Strengthen Business Partnerships

To deliver a quality, safe, and responsible recreation program, the Forest Service will need to continue to rely on strong relationships with our recreation partners and cooperators. Declining budgets were the original catalyst, but as the private sector found ways to get the job done at a lower cost, we learned that these relationships also enhanced the variety and quality of services. Expectations and responsibilities of both parties must be clearly defined. There is a need

to look at long-term investment and authorities for both existing and future development, always evaluating the business interest within the context of the Forest Service mandate of responsible management of natural resources.

Review Professional Business Practices

We will improve business relationships with contractors and permit holders by making it easier for them to do business on the national forests where appropriate. Streamlined processes will involve less paperwork, impose fewer delays, and be more predictable. We will train Forest Service personnel to become knowledgeable of business parameters such as market research, profit and loss, and contract and permit administration.

Seek New and Expand Existing Partnerships

In addition to private sector business partnerships, there is a growing interest and need to expand other partnerships in the management and delivery of recreation. These include community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations, tourism organizations, interpretive associations, and volunteers. We recognize the contributions that existing partnerships with volunteer-based,

nonprofit organizations have made in providing long-term stewardship of public resources. We will renew and strengthen these relationships.

Promote Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Government Cooperation

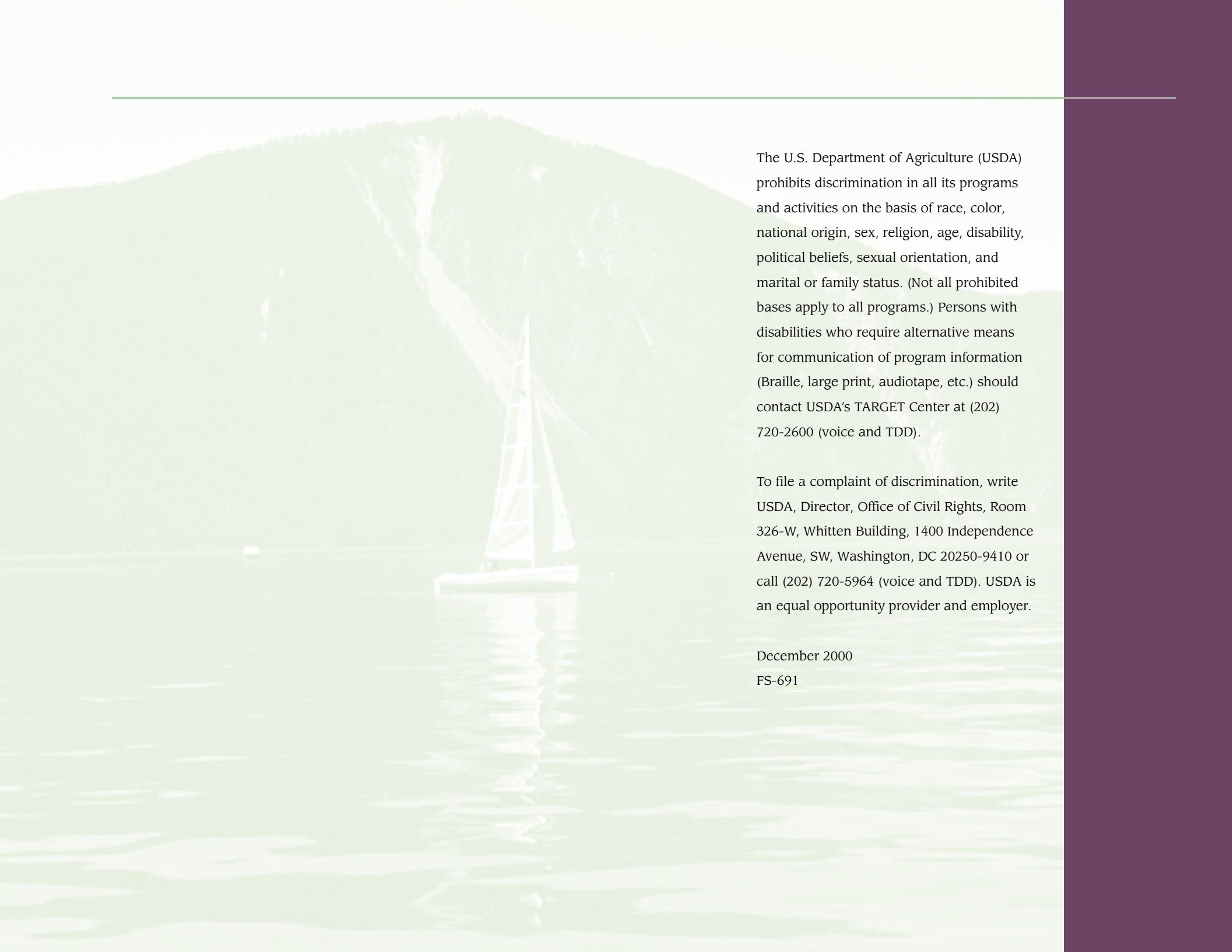
Many of our long-standing relationships with Federal, Tribal, State, and local public agency representatives will need to be even closer to maximize efficiencies and plan for mutually beneficial recreation activities. We will coordinate with other governmental bodies and offer "Cooperating Agency" status to those agencies having a stake in our decisions. ❖



CONCLUSION

Our agenda will guide Forest Service recreation programs into the 21st century. We will prioritize projects based on feedback from our partners and local communities, in accordance with sustainable land management practices. We will leverage funding for new projects through grants, our partners and volunteers, and our Fee

Demonstration Program. We will focus on our core competency—offering outstanding natural settings for dispersed recreation. We will also improve our customer service, expand our conservation education and interpretation, and build community relationships. ❖



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December 2000

FS-691

